This annotated bibliography contains 26 references on writing apprehension found in the ERIC database. The bibliography contains citations from the period between 1985 and 1989 and is divided into four sections. The first section lists sources of teaching ideas. Citations in the second section deal with the use of computers in alleviating writing apprehension. Articles and papers in the third section discuss writing apprehension in students with special needs. The last section presents references dealing with the latest research on writing anxiety. (MS)
Writing Apprehension
by Michael Shermis

Instructors of students experiencing writing apprehension can always use new strategies to put their students at ease. A search of the ERIC database produced the following citations on writing apprehension, all from the period 1985 to 1989. The first section lists sources of teaching ideas. Citations in the second section deal with the use of computers in alleviating writing apprehension. Articles and papers in the third section discuss writing apprehension in students with special needs. The last section presents references to the latest research on writing anxiety.

Abstracts for some of the articles cited here have been abbreviated to conform to the FAST Bib format. The ED numbers for sources included in Resources in Education have been included to enable the user to go directly to microfiche collections, to order from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS), or to go to RIE for the full abstract on those sources not available through EDRS. The citations to journals are from the Current Index to Journals in Education, and these articles can be acquired most economically from library collections or through interlibrary loans. Reprint services are also available from University Microfilms International (UMI) and from the Original Article Tarsheet Service (OATS) of the Institute for Scientific Information.

Contact ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS), 3900 Wheeler Avenue, Alexandria, Virginia 22304; (703) 823-0500 or (800) 227-3742, to order and to obtain current prices of hard copies or microfiche of documents available through EDRS.

Instructional Strategies


Suggests motivating writing apprehensive students by asking them to "remodel" passages from novels, magazines, or newspapers that have been stripped of details, descriptions, and compound sentences.


The rhetorical cycle is a step-by-step approach that provides classroom experience before students actually write, thereby making the writing process less frustrating for them. This approach consists of six sequential steps: reading, thinking, speaking, listening, discussing, and finally writing.


Draws a parallel between the resistance experience of a patient in psychoanalysis and the resistance expressed by students in composition or literature courses.

By building up the confidence of student writers, writing teachers hope to reduce the hostility and anxiety so often found in authoritarian introductory college composition classes. Process-oriented writing theory implicitly defines confidence as a wholly personal quality resulting from students' discovery that they do have "something to say" to readers. However, the social dimension of the writing act is lost in such a formulation. Peer group revision, journal writing, portfolios of student writing samples, and revision after turning in the paper are all methods that build personal confidence and social authority—all help dilute the concentration of authority in the teacher and give students a stake in what goes on both in the classroom and in their own writing.


Advocates teachers' belief in students' ability to achieve writing success, rather than assuming failure that results in a self-fulfilling prophecy.


Describes a combined process writing approach and extended conference method of writing instruction applied to eighth grade students. Presents the experiences of several students who refused to write at first but soon became proud of their writing after several extended conferences.


In an effort to reduce student writing apprehension, an informal, in-class study was conducted in a lower-level college writing course at an Alabama university. Throughout the course, all writing was based on student experiences and came from student journals, all assignments were completed in class and reviewed in small group discussions, and specific criteria from a rating scale used to evaluate student essays were discussed. Findings from these observations and Writing Apprehension Test (WAT) post-test scores indicated that 13 students were less apprehensive about their writing after the course than before it. In addition, results showed that students wrote more in their later essays, suggesting a greater willingness to commit themselves on paper.


Offers a test for identifying students with writing apprehension and offers strategies for dealing with these students.


Describes an ethnographic study of an in-service graduate course designed to help teachers use computers to teach writing and other skills to the academically able. Claims the course significantly reduced teachers' computer anxiety and their writing apprehension.


Argues that computers can be useful partners in the writing process even for reluctant or poor writers. Describes from a linguistic perspective factors that help explain why writing is a difficult task and briefly describes several computer programs which are based on such factors.

Teichman, Milton; Poris, Marilyn. Wordprocessing in the Classroom: Its Effects on Freshman Writers. 1985. 59p. [ED 276 062]

To learn more about the impact of word processing on the writing of college freshmen, a study investigated several aspects of how using word processing affects the writing process, including whether word processing affects writing anxiety. Findings showed that using computers significantly reduced writing apprehension while also increasing a student's ability to recognize standard written English.

Examines the initial effects of word processing on essay-writing performance and on writing apprehension. Eighty students wrote essays using terminals linked to a mainframe computer (experimental group), while another 80 students wrote essays in the traditional mode using pens, pencils, or typewriters (control group). Finds that the experimental group made greater progress than the control group from the pre- to post-essay test, but the same group did not demonstrate superior performance on the six required essays of the course. For writing apprehension, there was no significant difference between the two groups.


Assesses the microcomputer’s effects on the process and quality of business writing, focusing on writing anxiety, computer anxiety, time spent in writing, writing quality, and the relationship of gender to these variables. Concludes that the most significant predictor of quality is initial writing ability.

Special Needs Students

When students have difficulty writing, it is often because they are apathetic or afraid of failing, rather than because of a serious lack of skill. Basic writing teachers must break through student apathy and fear before the students can make progress. There are several methods to help students to regard writing as a conquerable skill, providing them with the impetus for further self-directed learning.


Presents findings of a descriptive study designed to compare instances of writer’s block in English and Spanish, among and within three groups of bilingual writers. Tries to determine if the same writing factors stymie both the novice bilingual writer and the practiced bilingual writer. Suggests ways to lessen writing apprehension.

Brown, Stuart; and others. “Reading-Writing Connections: College Freshman Basic Writers’ Apprehension and Achievement.” Paper presented at the 37th Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, 1986. 18p. [ED 274 965]

Focusing on the relationships between performance, skills, and attitudes, a study conducted at the University of Arizona measured the effects of reading and writing apprehension on basic writers. Results suggested that the course, designed to equip students with strategies for composing, helped students gain the confidence necessary to increase writing skill.


Explores developmental students’ attitudes toward writing as a reflection of their writing performance. Finds that the skills of students with positive attitudes toward writing improved significantly more than did those of students with neutral or negative attitudes. Includes a student writing attitude questionnaire and a questionnaire analysis sheet.

Recent Research

Research into writing anxiety is an off-shoot of research into oral communication anxiety. At first, researchers thought that people with high oral communication anxiety tended to compensate by writing. However, when the Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Test was used, it was found that the link between oral and written anxiety did not exist. Recent research is leading to the conclusion that anxiety is not the real culprit behind poor writing but is only a component of a negative attitude about writing. Writing may be improved by a change in the perceptions of the teacher/evaluator about writing attitudes. One of the ways to counteract writing anxiety is to improve the skills of the writer. Writing skills improvement courses in schools and work settings should be taught in nontraditional ways, and evaluation by teachers should be reduced, substituting peer or self-evaluation when possible.
Writing apprehension needs to be understood, and solutions found for it, so that students' fears can be lessened and their success with writing increased. Carl Rogers' client-centered, nondirective psychotherapy applies well to teaching composition. This approach was utilized in a class of freshman composition students in order to determine the degree of attitude improvement during one semester. Results indicated that it does not necessarily reduce writing apprehension, and that writing apprehension tests need to be given at the beginning of a course to identify fearful students so they can be helped.


Tests the hypothesis that high writing-apprehensive subjects would differ significantly from low writing-apprehensive subjects regarding the writing intensity of their jobs. Suggests that where a lack of writing productivity exists in writing-intensive jobs, managers might examine writing-apprehension problems, or at least examine the match between levels of apprehension and writing requirements.


Reports on a study of writing apprehension in writing center tutors, results of which indicated a strong correspondence between various dimensions of writing apprehension and specific teaching behaviors that do not aid the student in problem detection or writing improvement.


To determine whether teacher intervention in the form of experimentally manipulated variables would significantly change the level of students' dispositional writing apprehension, a study evaluated the effects of two classroom interventions— one apprehension-producing (AP) and one apprehension-reducing (AR). Findings showed that (1) the growth scores in the AP group were significantly different from those in the AR group; (2) the number of students experiencing decreased dispositional apprehension was significantly higher in the AR group than in the AP group; and (3) the number of students experiencing an increase in dispositional apprehension was significantly higher in the AP group than in the AR group.


Examines the effects of background and personality on the attitudes of developing writers. Finds a significant correlation between writers' attitudes and their personality traits, writing apprehension, and writing background.


Presents three broad areas—writing anxiety, motivation, and beliefs—that seem to be ripe for study in terms of affect, and suggests that the constructivist views refined by George Mandler could be helpful to drive such research.


The essays in this book address various cognitive and emotional dimensions of disrupted composing and describe some of the situational variables that can contribute to it. Includes the following essays: "Blocking and the Young Writer";